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ABSTRACT

The world has not previously experienced migration to the extent that it does today, and the situation is likely to intensify in the future. Millions of people leave their homes because of war, persecution, and other disasters, or simply in search of work. Migration often creates problems in the receiving areas, and ignorance often engenders hatred toward newcomers. The school and the school library have big responsibilities in neutralizing this hatred. Examples are provided of how fiction can be used as a preventive measure in working with such problems. Fiction is one of the most effective means of making children understand what is happening and making them respect other cultures and religions. Fiction is often superior to fact because facts often become abstract, while fiction, since it is about "real" people, makes the problems questions of human beings. Examples of children's fiction that can be used to promote understanding are given, drawing on Swedish culture and children's literature. (Contains 17 references.) (SLD)

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Getting to know you: fiction as a tool to create a world of mutual understanding and respect

Presentation by Gunilla Janlert
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The world has never before witnessed a migration as large as today, not even during the Germanic Invasions which is considered the largest migration era in history. Millions of people are forced to leave their homes because of war, persecution, famine, environmental disaster or "simply" because they must find a work. All migration is however not due to catastrophes, the European common market for example will allow, and even encourage, people to work in any country within the community. The number of refugees alone, according to United Nations statistics, exceeds 17 millions of people and there is, as far as I know, no world-wide statistics on the remaining migration.

Whatever the reasons for the migration may be it often creates problems in the receiving areas, problems of economic and social character, and last but not least problems of coexistence. Ignorance often engenders hostility and the ignorance is a great threat against those who are different, e.g. immigrants and street-children, since people in the receiving areas know very little about those who arrive. The school, and consequently the school library, has a big responsibility for neutralizing this hostility. If we take a look at Sweden we can see that the Swedish people's attitude towards foreigners has changed during the last few years and we have seen several attacks on refugee camps, on shops and on restaurants owned by immigrants. The schools have now intensified their work on the immigrant issue as a result of this change in attitude.

I will in this presentation concentrate on the role of the school library and in particular give examples of how fiction can be used to illustrate the problems. I do this mainly from a Swedish perspective, with a basis in our curriculum, but I am convinced that the fundamental idea is applicable all over the world.

But I will as an introduction give a short presentation of Sweden and its modern immigration history. Sweden is a rich, sparsely populated country (21 persons per km^2). The last war on Swedish ground took place in 1809 and Sweden declared neutral during both the 1:st and the 2:nd world wars. Being

neutral not only meant that Sweden took no active part in the wars but it also meant that we during the 2:nd world war admitted refugees from occupied countries and people who were persecuted because of race or religious belief. The Swedish people's attitude was in general very well-inclined to those refugees. Most of them, except those fro. eastern Europe, returned to their countries when the war was over.

Sweden was a developing country before the 1:st world war but had a tremendous advantage after the wars since everything was intact, and the real rise of the Swedish industry could begin. The first post-war immigrants were industrial workers from the whole of Europe. The late sixties however brought a new group of immigrants to Sweden, refugees from outside Europe and in 1969 the Swedish Immigration Board was founded. The decline in world economy, wars and persecution have now changed the whole picture and the major part of the immigrants are persons seeking asylum. This change is also reflected in the Swedish people's attitude to immigrants. The early post-war immigrants were coveted workers who helped to increase the gross national product whereas the refugees of today come from totally different cultures and involve a cost for the society while they are waiting for their residence permit. They have, up till now, not been allowed to work during that period and the average waiting time is still about two years even if the number of asylum seeking persons has decreased (the civil war in Yugoslavia has however resulted in an increasing number the last couple of months). That, together with the decline in the Swedish economy, has resulted in an increasing hostility, and even racism, towards foreigners which the Swedish schools work intensively on counteracting.

The present curriculum says that "the school shall develop qualities that support and strengthen the democracy's principles on tolerance, cooperation and equal rights. ... This implies among other things that the school shall raise the students to awareness that no human being should be exposed to oppression and that no one with problems and difficulties should be left on his own. Everyone has a responsibility to try to reduce other people's pain, suffering and humiliation. ... The school shall seek to found solidarity with neglected groups within and outside the country. It shall actively work for integration of the immigrants in our country's community. ... This means that the school shall aim at giving the students an ability to

enter into and understand how other people live and a will to act for their best, too."[1](my translation)

This part of the curriculum gives so to say the frame but the teachers and the students paint the picture, and you will never get the same picture twice. They study different religions, agriculture, economy, geography, history, folk-tales, manners and customs, food and clothing, the present political situation and environmental problems. The list can be very long and the approach depends among other things on the age of the students. But the direction is also a question of the students' own neighbourhood; if there *are* any immigrants and from which countries they come. And I will, just to illustrate this, give you examples of how two schools in Umeå have worked.

One senior level school worked intensively on the refugee issue for one week. Refugees from different countries were invited to classes to tell about why and how they fled, what it was like to come to Sweden, the difference in life and so on. The students studied the situation for refugees in different parts of the world, they cooked foreign meals in their home economic lessons and studied Persian carpets in their handicraft lessons. And in addition to this some classes were visited by librarians who presented fiction about refugees. This week required a huge number of books, both fiction and non fiction and articles from magazines and newspapers. One of the key-persons behind the week was the school librarian, assisted by the school library centre where I work, who supplied teachers and students with the necessary material. Some of the books I present in this paper were introduced at the book-talks.

At another school, the junior level studied some of the countries Umeå has immigrants from. They concentrated on their cultures and studied clothing, houses, games, languages, but they also studied the situation of the children in these countries and they read children's literature, both folk-tales and modern books.

The curriculum stated that the school shall give the students an "ability to enter into and understand how other people live" and this can, as I said, be done in many ways. But they all have one thing in common; they re-

[1] Läroplan för grundskolan: allmän del. Liber UtbildningsFörlaget, Stockholm 1980. pp 17-18.

quire a lot of written material: articles and books, fiction and non-fiction. With all due reference to facts, but they often become too abstract, they do not "live". Fiction on the other hand is about "real" people, it takes the problems to a question of human beings. This is one of the reasons why fiction, in my opinion, is superior to non-fiction.

It might be interesting, as a matter of curiosity, to give a historical introduction when young adults in Sweden discuss immigration. Sweden was, as I said earlier, a poor country and about 1 1/4 million Swedes emigrated only to the United States. What did the American people think about them, Did they like them or were they a nuisance to others? Erskine Caldwell, best known for his novel the Tobacco Road, has written a short story, "Country Full Of Swedes", that turns many ideas upside-down. The main character wakes up one morning by a terrible noise all around the house and when he asks what is going on, he is told that the Swedes were coming and they should save what could be saved. He says:" I wasn't any more scared of the Swedes than I was of the Finns and Portuguese, anyway. It's a god-awful shame for Americans to let Swedes and Finns and the Portuguese scare the daylights out of them. God-helping, they are no different than us, and you never see a Finn of a Swede scared of an American. But people like Jim and Mrs. Frost are scared to death of Swedes and other people from the old countries".[2]

It is easy to believe that the refugee problem is a modern phenomenon and it is important to show that this is not the case. I once asked some classes if they could guess who is the most famous refugee in history and I got many different suggestions, major part from modern time, but almost no one thought about Jesus. The Danish author Cecil Bødker has written two novels about Jesus, "Marias barn" (The child of Mary) and in part 1, Drengen (The Boy) she describes Mary's paralysing fatigue when they had arrived in Egypt, she felt as empty as the house. They had brought almost nothing, knew no one at all and Mary longed for her family and friends. But everything changed when her new neighbours came to visit her and gave her small things they needed for their everyday life. This is of course a completely natural reaction, the feeling is not conditioned by time or place and it is easy to take the description to your heart when you read it and apply to the refugees' situation today.

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[2] Caldwell, Erskine: Jackpot; The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, 1948, p. 440

A common starting-point when you begin to talk about refugees is to ask yourself why they have left their country. It is important to show that the majority do it not out of curiosity, or because they think they will make a fortune in the new country, but because they have to. The poor people end up in camps in other countries as poor as their own and some, who have enough money and who know what country they want to go to, they go there. Some of them buy their service from smugglers of human beings but these smugglers do often lead their victims right into death. The German author Werner J. Egli tells in his book "Wenn ich Flügel hätte" (If I Had Wings) about a poor Mexican family who plans to go to the United States because they are no longer able to make their living in their home village. Their "helper" takes them to the desert, points out the direction, says "There is America", and leaves them. The direction was correct, but the distance was too long for them, and the water they finally found was not drinkable, it was alkali lakes and those who drank the water died.

But there are of course others that help people cross borders, persons that do it out of belief and they would never dream of cheating their "clients". Mahmut Baksi, Kurdish writer from Turkey who lives in Sweden has written a novel, "Helin" about a girl and her family who is persecuted, tortured and raped because they are Kurdish. Friends help them cross the Syrian border and Helin tells: "We crept over the cut barb wire and began sliding ahead with the help of the elbows over the mine field, as the smugglers had told us. You mustn't crawl on your knees they said, your had to lie down as flat as possible with your nose on the ground and carefully wriggle along. ... They had placed a child between every grown up so that the adults could throw themselves over us and protect us with their bodies if something happened. All the men were armed."[3](my translation)

Helin and her family went to Sweden and when an asylum seeking person arrives in Sweden he is questioned by the police and then is either let into the country or refused. But the decision might be long and some will be put in custody while waiting. It is not difficult to imagine what it feels like when your dream of freedom turns into a nightmare of uncertainty and you are put in prison without having committed a crime. Inger Brattström describes in her book "Selime - utan skyddsnät" (Selime - without safety net)

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[3] Baksi, Mahmut: Helin; Arbetarkultur, Stockholm, 1983, p. 90

how a Pakistani family belonging to the Ahmadiya sect decide to go to Sweden. They had an uncle who lived in Sweden and he told them to come: "This is a good country. Democracy and freedom, no persecution. The children can go to good schools. Free of charge. And you can be ill too, it costs nothing...if you don't have the money, you get it from the social welfare office. Come here. To Sweden."[4](my translation) But what happens when they get here? They are not recognized as religious refugees, and Selime's father is put in prison because there is a risk they might run away and hide themselves. He is being released when her mother looses the baby she is expecting but he is no longer the man he used to be, he is broken. The family has to wait more then two years for the decision, the children go to school, make new friends and the whole family is slowly adapting to their new life. When the decision finally is made it is a refusal and they are forced to leave country. The book ends with their plane taking off.

These examples illustrate very well what kind of experiences refugees may have had to go through before they reach their place of destination. I think that most people never have thought about it in this way and it is important to show that it is not a question of just making a reservation on a train or a plane. I know that these books will not leave them untouched. It is of course a risk that they will get a feeling of "it's no use I get involved, I can't do anything to help", but this is wrong. Siv Widerberg tells in her book "En otrolig historia" (An incredible story) about a senior level school and what happened when one of the students and her family received an expulsion order and should be sent back to Chile. The pupil's council first decide to demonstrate and then, when they realised that the demonstration did not lead to anything, went on a strike, occupied the school and finally went on a hunger strike. Need I say that the decision of the Immigration Board was changed and the family could stay. This might perhaps sound like a fairy tale, but the truth is that the book is based on several cases where children and adults have fought for families that have been threatened with expulsion.

It is very difficult for someone who have never been to another country, or have just been a tourist, to imagine what it is like to come to a new country, with a new language, perhaps even a new alphabet, new customs, yes a completely new culture. One of the first Swedish authors of children's li-

[4] Brattström, Inger: Selime - utan skyddsnät; Rabén & Sjögren, Stockholm, 1989, pp 22-23

terature who wrote about immigrants was Gun Jacobson. In her book "Tack - håll käften" (Thanks - Shut Up) she tells about a Greek family coming to Sweden. The children are just beginning to learn some Swedish when a group of teenagers start making fun of their Swedish and tell them that they will teach them some new words. But the thing is that they teach the wrong words, for example that you say "Shut up" when you mean "Thank you". The whole family find it difficult to adapt to their new life, nothing turns out to be the way they expected. Manolis, one of the boys hates school, "He hates Sweden. He cannot understand how he will endure three years in school and three years in Sweden. He wants to go home - home to Greece - at once - to a country where people talk properly and eat real food and dress reasonably. Not as in Sweden! This damned country!"[5] (my translation)

The question of adaption is important. Quite a number of Swedes think that immigrants shall become Swedes, i.e. put aside their original cultural identity, including their religious rules. But there is also often a conflict within the family, The children both want to live like their friends, to be a part of their new society, and still keep parts of their own culture, and the parents see how *their* whole pattern of life falls apart. Khalid Hussain, Pakistani immigrant in Norway, was 16 years old when he wrote his first novel "Pakkis" (Swedish title in translation: "Fucking blackhead") about a Pakistani boy called Sajjad. The book is not autobiographical but is based on both his and other immigrants experiences. One day Sajjad's father tells the rest of the family that he plans to send his daughter back to Pakistan because: "I don't want her to grow up in this society. It is not made for us, especially not for our girls. If she grows up here she will forget her native country, her culture. It is somewhat different with girls than with boys. So much more they have to think about. If Nadia grows up here, there will be a great pressure about clothes among other things put on her. I do not for example want her to wear tight jeans. Or walk around with a chewing gum in her mouth."[6](my translation from the Swedish edition) At another occasion he tells Sajjad: "Don't you start comparing yourself to other boys. It is not my problem if they do not know how to pray, but it is my problem that you don't know how to pray. Think of your old country! You are not a Norwegian! You will never become like them even if you dress like them. You are Pakistani, get that into your head.

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[5] Jacobson, Gun: Tack - håll käften; Bonniers, Stockholm 1972, p.49

[6] Hussain, Khalid: Jävla svartskalle; Rabén & Sjögren, Stockholm, 1987, p 25

That is why I want to send Nadia to Pakistan, because I do not want her to become like you."[7](my translation from the Swedish edition)

Annelies Schwarz tells in her book "Hamide spielt Hamide" (Hamide plays Hamide) about a teacher in Germany who mounts a school play about families from different countries living in the same house. The students write the dialogue and they play more or less themselves. The play becomes very important to them and especially to Hamide, a 14 years old Turkish girl, who lives a hard life at home. She has to do a lot of home work, take care of her brothers and machine-knit sweaters for sale and her father keeps her from school and let her work instead. He does not at first approve of her acting but finally gives his permission and the first performance can take place. But the real problems start after they have finished playing, when one of the boys in the group wants to take her out for an ice-cream. She is of course not allowed and in her desperation about the whole situation she takes sleeping pills and is taken to hospital. She survives - but her father sends her back to Turkey where he already has arranged for her marriage.

In Sweden, as well as in the United States, Great Britain and many other countries, we take so many things for granted. We find it hard to accept that young people should not be allowed to see people they want to see, to go where they want to go and to take part in different social activities. But a great part of the immigrants plan to return some day and they want their children to be a part of *that* society, not the new one, and that would not be possible if they become Swedish, or English, or.... At least the parents believe so - but their countries change too. But it makes life very hard for the children since they do not know where they belong, they often have to balance on a knife-edge, to live a double life and some of them do not make it, they feel as if they were only half and some try to commit suicide or become criminals. They need all the help and understanding they can get from friends and adults to avoid that development.

The prior books deal with people moving to another country, but the major part of those who move do it within their country. Most of the developing countries have huge problems with people moving from the country-side to the towns. We all know what problems this has created: ghettos, unemploy-

[7] ibid p. 32

ment, begging, criminality, prostitution of different kinds, drugs and diseases just to mention a few examples. It is easy to say that people should know better than to move to the cities, but what choice do many of them have. Wars or environmental disasters ruin their fields, they are in the hands of banks and loan-sharks, land-owners who do not need them any more or send them away because they demand human rights. So the cities are the only places they can go to. And there is of course also deep inside them a hope that the city will mean the start of something good. But the children are, as always, the great losers, millions of them end up as street-children of which some are runaways because of sexual abuse or maltreatment and many other are deserted by their parents. These children have no home and have to steal to get food and they get no education, they are received with contempt and hatred, a fair game to kill or use for prostitution, drug traffic, all sorts of crimes and they have no rights at all.

But what do we really know about their life? Those who live in the same cities as the street-children just see the bad sides, they are just criminals to them. Wealthy people in Rio de Janeiro for example probably do not know more about their real conditions than we do in Sweden.

In 1981 a Swedish author, Mats Larsson, wrote two books for young adults about street-children in Colombia and these books shocked both children and adults because of their naked description. And, what is more important, they started a movement among the Swedish students both to raise money for the children and to rouse a public opinion to make it more difficult for the governments to ignore the situation of these children. One of the books, Gatans barn (Children of the Street) is an easy-reader about a boy gang living in the streets of Bogotá. These children steal, and commit other crimes, there are fights both within and between the different gangs, but there is also a total solidarity and they protect and help each other when necessary. This is a very dark book, or which is more correct, this is a very realistic book, where the author does not try to beautify their lives. The main character dies at the end, hit by a car because he is too weak, suffering from a stomach disease, and can not cross a street fast enough. Mats Larsson's latest book, "Gatflickan" (The Street Girl), is a cruel, very pessimistic, but credible book about the organised hunt for street-children in Rio de Janeiro. The shop owners hire death patrols to kill them during the nights, patrols that often consist of freelancing policemen. One

can say that these activities are in a way officially approved since the killers never, or almost never, get caught or sentenced. Esmeralda is about 12 years old when her mother's lover sells her body to an American tourist. She runs away and becomes one of the children who live on the beach where stealing, begging and prostitution is a part of their daily life. Their world is very dangerous, there is of course always a risk that they might get caught, but what she fears the most is not starvation or the police - it is the death patrols. "Those who come at night to kill us. They say that they do not exist and I know that you would like to believe it, but I have to disappoint you. There are several kinds. Those with their balls hard laced in tight jeans and with pill-swelling muscles are the ones I fear most. That kind strangles. They surprise us when we lie alone and unprotected. And their hands are closed around our necks and something is crashing under your skin, cartilage perhaps or cervical vertebras and our arms and legs hit, kick and twitch in the death struggle. We rarely escape that kind of hands. Then there is the kind we call friend of order. His clothes are looser and he kills with the same determination as he takes a shower. He looks like a friend of the family, someone who sat at your table and ate what was put on it. He gave you little presents, but he earned it by killing us."[8] (my translation) I do not think that I need to make any comments.

The books I have dealt with so far are either about people who have to leave their native country and about poor people or social drop-outs within a community. But it is as important to get to know others that are not like you, weather they have another religious belief or are handicapped or otherwise live in a different way. Most of us believe that our way of life is the right one, but who can tell what is right or what is wrong. Hanna Johansen tells in her book "Die Ente und die Eule" (translation of Swedish title: Are You A Real Owl? Said The Wild Duck) a story about an owl and a wild duck who meet one day. Neither of them can understand the other and they argue about everything. Everything about the other is strange: how and what they eat, where they live and so on. But all their arguments finish the same way, they accept that the other has his way of living. "This is not true, said the owl. I'm not doing it wrongly, I just do it in another way, and that is all right too. I simply do it in the owl way. -And I do it in the wild duck way. You're right. This isn't anything you have to argue

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[8] Larsson, Mats: Gatflickan; AWE/Gebers, Stockholm, 1991. pp 11-12

about."[9](my translation from the Swedish edition) And they are correct, you must have the right to live your life the way it suits *you* best as long as you do not hurt anybody.

We all are products of our society and the way we have been raised. Norman Silver tells in his book "No Tigers In Africa" about a white family who moves from South Africa to England. Selwyn has never considered himself a racist but he is shocked by the way black and white are together in England, they even kiss in public. And nothing happens to them! No one understands him even if he tries to explain: "Anyway, we had this discussion about apartheid, which I don't agree with, no way, though I've never taken much interest in politics. He said *all* the people of South Africa should have a vote. 'No, you don't know what it's like there' I said. 'Most black people don't know what voting's about.' 'But all people are the same,' Jeff said. 'They should mix together and have the same rights.' 'No, people are all different,' I said. 'They shouldn't mix together in a mixmaster if they don't want it.' 'But don't you think all people are equal?' he asked. 'Of course,' I said. 'You think I'm in favour of apartheid. My family votes for change. Honestly. But most of the blacks aren't educated enough to have a proper vote. They should be allowed to elect their own black leaders, and leave the whites to vote in the government.' Jeez, that made him wild. He looked at me like I was a criminal. And he wouldn't speak to me after that..." [10] This book at least made me for the first time understand the deep effect the apartheid system has on people and it is an excellent book for young adults when you discuss the impact of political or social systems. It also shows very clearly the psychological effect the encounter with another political system might have on people moving from one country to another.

I do not know what is most difficult for the unintiated to understand, ethnical or religious conflicts, but the hidden walls between people are often even more effective than those you can see. You do not make friends between the groups, and a Serb does not marry a Croat, a Jew not an Arab or, here in Northern Ireland, a protestant a catholic. This does not mean that there are not any exemptions, but they have to face many difficulties and are often harassed by both groups. Joan Lingard has written a trilogy about a

[9] Johansen, Hanna: Är du en riktig uggla? sa gräsanden; Opal Stockholm, 1990. pp 32-33

[10] Silver, Norman: No tigers in Africa. Faber and Faber Limited, London 1990. p 8

protestant girl and a catholic boy from Belfast who fall in love with each other. It all begins on the eighth of July when Sadie and her brother sneaks in on catholic territory. Someone had destroyed their mural of King Billy, catholics of course, and Sadie and her brother are going to take revenge the next night. She is caught and meets Kevin for the first time. They begin to like each other, but their friendship is impossible since they come from two different worlds and she knows that her father would get a heart attack if he knew they were friends. Their falling in love is even more impossible and Kevin is attacked by his friends who call him traitor, Sadie gets noticed and a friend who let them meet in his house is killed by a Molotov cocktail. They know that they can not stay in Belfast and decide to leave for London.

It is impossible to understand this "stubbornness" when you look upon it from outside, the way one group talk about the other, it is more or less like the owl and the wild duck I talked about earlier, except that the groups in real life neither talk to each other nor come to the conclusion that you can do things in your own way. I think that one of our responsibilities as librarians, as teachers *and* as human beings is to counteract this lack of understanding and respect. We all are human beings and there is enough room for all of us and we all need each other.

Let me finish this book odyssey by quoting Pierre Bourgeat, a Danish writer. His book "Den lange rejse" (The Long Journey) tells about a boy who lives in a country in the middle of the world, where the sun always shines and where palms grow everywhere. But one day some men arrive, "They were tall and dark and wore long, strange clothes I did not recognize. They came, and they went - and took my father with them even if he did not want to. They did not say why. Or where they took him. They just took him."(my translation from the Swedish edition) And later on they burned his house and the boy and his family has to leave. They go to another country and "We arrived to a town with many people, with cars and high houses that were not built out of clay. And here we live. Here are people that I do not know and children who speak a language I do not understand. But they can play with a ball, just like me. And they can laugh too, just like me."[11](my translation from the Swedish edition) This is a picture book, painted in mild water-colours, warm and bright in the beginning but the colours change with the

[11]Bourgeat, Pierre: Den lange rejse; Höst & Söns Forlag, Copenhagen, 1990.

story and when the boy looks through the window in his new home, the colour is as grey as he feels. I think that he, as well as every child on earth, deserves warm, bright colours in their life, and that all of us, children and adults, must contribute in making it a good and dignified life.

Some problems are too delicate to leave to textbooks and I have tried to show how fiction can be used when working with complex issues such as refugees and immigration. But a fiction based teaching demands a well equipped school library and librarians and teachers who can introduce the books to the students. The books I have presented are books I have found in Sweden and a major part of them are unfortunately not translated into English. But I am convinced that there other books in your countries that will serve the same purpose. And it is not the titles that are most important, it is the model! This model can also be used when working with other topics, e.g. geography, history, emotions and relations. It is ultimately a question of what you want to achieve with the teaching, superficial or profound knowledge. The textbook will probably be soon forgotten but good novel will stay in your mind for long.

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